

What is it?

Birth control pills, often called “the Pill”, are pills that you take daily to prevent pregnancy. They are made of hormones that occur naturally in a woman’s body.

FACT: 85% of US women have taken the Pill at some time in their lives.

Getting Started with the Pill

You are about to join the millions of women who have safely taken the Pill! Follow the step-by-step instructions below to get the most positive, worry-free start with the Pill:

- Most women start the Pill the first week of their period, unless their period is not regular. Your health provider will tell you the best time to start, based on your cycle.
- Swallow one pill every day, around the **same time** (within 2 - 4 hours) each day.
- Take one pill a day, **in order**, even if you have spotting or bleeding between periods.
- When you finish a pack of pills, begin the next pack. For example, if you take your last pill on Saturday, start your next pack on Sunday.
- During your first 7 days on the pill, you are not fully protected against pregnancy. You need to use a backup method like **condoms** during this time.

TIP: Try to choose something that you do around the same time each day, like eating lunch or brushing your teeth, to help you get into a good pill-taking routine.

What to Expect: Common Side Effects

You may experience side effects with the Pill. Usually, these side effects will go away after 2 - 6 months, as your body gets used to being on the Pill. Some common side effects are:

- bleeding between periods (“breakthrough bleeding”)
- breast tenderness
- headaches
- feeling bloated
- nausea (very rarely, throwing up)
- weight gain or loss
- changes in mood

If you feel that these side effects are becoming a problem for you, **don’t** stop taking the Pill. Call your health provider or clinic first. Sometimes, changing to a different type of pill can help. There are over **40** different brands of pills available today! Your health provider can work with you to find the best pills for **your body**.

“When I first started taking the Pill, I was taking it in the mornings before work, and I felt sick to my stomach. A nurse told me to try taking the pills at night, before I go to bed. It definitely helped. After a few months, I didn’t feel sick at all”

— Vanessa, age 23
hairstylist, one child

When You Miss a Pill...

There may be times when you miss or forget to take a pill. The chart below will help you to make up your pills when this happens. Making up missed pills can sometimes be confusing. If you’re ever unsure about what to do, call your health provider or clinic.

If you miss or forget... 1 pill	Then do these 3 things: <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Take the missed pill as soon as you remember● Take the next pill at your regular time● Keep taking 1 pill a day as usual
If you miss or forget... 2 pills in a row during the first 2 weeks of your pill pack	Then do these 4 things: <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Take 2 pills as soon as you remember● Take 2 more pills the next day at your regular time● Go back to taking 1 pill a day● IMPORTANT: Use a backup method like condoms for 7 days
If you miss or forget... 2 pills in a row during the 3rd week of your pill pack OR 3 or more pills at any time	Then do these 3 things: <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Call your health provider or clinic as soon as possible - you may need emergency contraception● Until you reach your health provider, keep taking 1 pill a day and use a backup method like condoms every time you have sex!● If you get to the “period week” pills (the pills in the 4th week of your pack), throw them out and start a new pill pack

Missed pills can cause spotting or bleeding between periods.

EC : Don’t Forget About **Emergency Contraception (EC)**! If you’ve missed more than 2 pills, and you have unprotected sex, EC can help prevent you from getting pregnant.

FACT: You are not the only person who has ever missed a pill!

Benefits of Being on the Pill

Women choose the Pill because it is safe, easy, and effective. But did you know that the Pill has also helped many women:

- Have regular periods
- Have lighter periods, with less pain and cramping
- Have stronger bones
- Skip a period that would normally come during an important event (like honeymoon, school exam)
- Improve acne

FACT: Research shows that the pill protects against: cancer of the ovaries and womb, ovarian cysts, and non-cancerous breast lumps.

Some Disadvantages: What You Should Know

While the Pill continues to be a popular choice for many women, it isn’t the best fit for everyone. The list below will help you to understand why the Pill is not the best choice for some women:

- You have to remember to take the Pill every day, around the same time every day
- The Pill does not protect you from HIV or other sexually transmitted infections (STDs). You need to use a **condom** with the Pill if you think you need protection
- Your pill pack isn’t invisible — some women want a method that no one can find out about
- Some women cannot take estrogen (a hormone found in many brands of the Pill)

What to Do if You Have a Problem

The Pill is one of the safest birth control methods you can choose. Serious problems happen **only rarely**. The most serious problem is the possibility of blood clots. Usually, a serious problem will start with “warning” signs. Know these signs, and contact your health provider, clinic, or emergency room if you have any of the following:

- Severe pain in your belly
- Severe chest pain or shortness of breath
- Severe pain or redness and swelling in your leg
- Severe headaches
- Eye problems, such as blurry vision, flashing lights or blindness.

Effectiveness

If 100 women took the Pill correctly (around the same time, every day) for a year, only 1 of them would get pregnant. The Pill is one of the most effective methods of birth control if you take it correctly.

REMEMBER: taking the Pill correctly means taking it around the same time (within 2 - 4 hours), every day.

Pregnancy and the Pill

If you want to become pregnant, just complete the pack you are on, and then stop taking the Pill. Use another birth control method, such as condoms, until you have had 1 - 2 periods. And start taking vitamins with folic acid (pre-natal vitamins). It's one of the best things you can do for your future child.

FACT: Taking the Pill will not affect your future ability to have children.

Common Questions

Why do I have to take the Pill around the same time (within 2 - 4 hours) every day?

When you take your pills at around the same time each day, you help keep the Pill's hormones at the **best level for preventing pregnancy**. You also help prevent things like spotting or breakthrough bleeding. It just makes good sense to take your pills around the same time, every day.

What if I miss a period?

If you forgot one or more pills... Call the clinic to schedule a pregnancy test and **keep taking your pills**.

If you took every pill on time... Keep taking your pills. If you miss a second period, call the clinic.

If I take antibiotics, will that change how well the Pill works?

Most health providers recommend that you use a back-up method of birth control, like condoms, if you have to take antibiotics. If you miss your period, call the clinic.

Should I stop taking the pill if I break up with my partner or stop having sex?

Stopping and starting the Pill can increase side effects such as bleeding between periods (“breakthrough bleeding”) and breast tenderness. This is one reason why health providers recommend that you keep taking the Pill, even **after** a break-up or a decision to stop having sex. It's also good to remember that the Pill gives you other health benefits, like **improved acne**, and **less painful periods**.

To learn more about other reversible birth control methods:

Check out our brochures on:

Depo Provera (“The Shot”)
Emergency Contraception (“EC”)
Condoms

Check out our website at:

www.metrokc.gov/health/famplan

To find a Family Planning Provider near you:

Call the Family Planning Hotline
1-800-770-4334 OR TTY 1-800-848-5429
For confidential information and referrals

To prevent pregnancy after unprotected sex, or after your birth control method fails:

Call the Emergency Contraception Hotline:
1-888-NOT-2-LATE (1-888-668-2528)
or check out the Emergency Contraception website:
www.not-2-late.com to find a clinic or pharmacy near you.



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